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CRITICISM AND COURAGE  
AND OTHER ESSAYS. BY  
FREDERICK RYAN.



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AND OTHER ESSAYS. BY  
FREDERICK RYAN.      ❧

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## *PREFACE*

I WOULD be the last to claim that the essays here reprinted deserved to be rescued from the magazines in which, with one exception, they first appeared ; the last in the book has not been in print before. Having undertaken, however, to make a selection of pieces for the series, I thought it better, in such a small compass, to keep the articles more or less to the one point, viz., the advocacy of intellectual freedom in Ireland as an essential prelude to real national progress.

One of the characteristics of modern Ireland which is most depressing and disquieting is its apathy and hypocrisy with regard to such issues as are here treated of. My experience is that quite half the educated and reflective people in Ireland to-day are in intellectual and moral revolt against the old and effete theological dogmas which are conventionally lauded, and on the maintenance of which immense sums are yearly expended. But these people are mostly afraid to speak out. This man is a shopkeeper and is afraid of losing his custom. That one is a newspaper proprietor or director and is afraid of losing his readers or offending his shareholders. Another is member of a County Council and is afraid of the opinion of his constituents. A reciprocal fear thus keeps in countenance a discredited creed. Ever, those in Ireland who take up in politics what

## PREFACE

is colloquially called an "anti-clerical" position are often at the greatest pains to protest their fundamental agreement with the theological basis on which all clericalism rests. Nothing is further from my desire than to censure anyone who finds that intellectual sincerity involves too great an economic sacrifice, nothing is cheaper than to prescribe heroic conduct for others. But I certainly maintain that such suppression of free thought as occurs in Ireland at the present time cannot be morally healthy for any nation. When men are afraid to freely speak their minds there is generated a mean habit and a moral cowardice which react injuriously on the whole national life. These little essays, then, which mostly discuss this topic, do not pretend to exhibit any literary graces or abstruse learning. I have spent no time constructing epigrams or moulding metaphors. And I am quite prepared to find my writing described as "shallow," "superficial," and the rest, by astute gentlemen who have sufficiently obvious motives for echoing what they suppose to be the beliefs of the crowd. The sole title of these criticisms to any reader's attention is that they are the frank expression of the writer's thoughts.

*November, 1906.*

F. R.



## *CRITICISM AND COURAGE*

WHENEVER any attempt is made in this country to set up a platform, however modest, for the unprejudiced discussion of political and religious opinions and beliefs, it is always interesting to note the numerous and subtle arguments employed in different quarters to prove that the process of argument should not be applied to all beliefs. Some time ago I was present at a rather paradoxical discussion in a club, of which I have the honour to be a member, and which avowedly meets for the interchange of opinion. The subject under consideration was the need, as alleged, for independent thinking in Ireland; but the conclusion of the "discussion," if it may be so summed up, was that one should have as few opinions as possible, and no expression of them at all. The futility of trying to change anyone's intimate beliefs; the impropriety and indecorum of government officials saying anything, even anonymously, in criticism of governmental practice; the propriety of teachers being obliged to resign if their opinions underwent any heterodox change, since in that case they were no longer qualified for their duties; the hardship of taking away "sources of comfort" in the shape of theological dogmas from those who had nothing to cling to but such comforts; the arrogance of those who

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set themselves up as dissenters from the majority-opinion, and so forth : the changes were rung by various speakers, men and women, on all these arguments for conformity, these counsels of quiescence. Let us never do or say anything that will cause the slightest mental change in anyone, was the rule of action to be logically deduced from the argument. From this to the proposition that the life of the oyster or the tortoise is to be preferred to the life of man is only a step ; and the final prescription of conformity might run : " Let us eat, drink, and sleep, but above all, *Silence !*" It is a small part of the paradox of conformity that this precept itself was volubly elaborated, and the doctrine of not changing our neighbour's beliefs was put forward by way of changing the beliefs of those of us who stood for the morality of progressive change.

In order to clear the discussion, then, let us take the commonest subject of public contention. In the case of politics it is quite obvious that everyone is seeking to influence public opinion in favour of the policy which he thinks desirable, or in which he is personally interested. In this country, political issues are discussed vigorously enough and often acrimoniously enough, and some of those who warn us against giving pain by criticising old traditions have themselves very little hesitation

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about giving pain to political opponents or ascribing their actions to base motives. It is true, of course, that the democratic side in Ireland, as elsewhere, has to bear the brunt of official and other pressure. The Government, through its extensive bureaucracy, and the Church, by its theological influence, exert an immense power which causes men to suppress their political convictions, or subconsciously find arguments for suppressing them. What government can do in that way we see every day; the spirit of Castlereagh is not dead in Dublin Castle, and the distribution of offices and favours affords an opportunity for the day-to-day repetition of the tactics by which the Act of Union was carried. As for the Church, we saw her political power during the Parnell crisis, and at present, for instance, we see her political influence exerted to press on members of Parliament and others a scheme of sectarian university "reform," for which there is little or no spontaneous public demand.

Notwithstanding these impediments and shackles, however, political discussion is comparatively free. Whenever anyone calls for a cessation of the political warfare and a "union of all classes," we know at once that he is a reactionary, well-meaning or otherwise. The real antithesis is not between politics and no-politics, but between good politics and bad; and part of good politics is to work for

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progress with as little personal ill-feeling and as much good taste as possible. In politics, then, we have little hesitation in "disturbing the beliefs" of those who would be glad to rest in the assurance that everything was for the best in the best-governed State in the world. And when we meet benign old people who think the "picturesque poverty" of the Irish peasant in the West is not to be disturbed as making for "spiritual excellence," we have, most of us, little compunction in shattering the "spiritual" dream. Political progress *must* involve change in political ideals and beliefs.

And the same falls to be said of literary and scientific discussion in the main. If a physician discovered a cure for cancer or tuberculosis, no one would dream for a moment of deterring him from publication on the ground that he might disturb the hitherto accepted view as to the origin and proper treatment of these diseases. In literature, too, criticism is free enough. Take at random any of the subjects of discussion or gossip in Ireland in the last year: Mr. Yeats' plays and Mr. O'Brien's "Conciliation," the Sinn Féin policy, and the National Exhibition—on all of these subjects we express ourselves with a commendable lack of reserve, though occasionally also with a boisterousness that, if not uniformly elevating, is at least not harmful.

The truth is that the kind of discussion



which is most condemned and against which the "arguments" mentioned at the beginning are mainly directed, is the discussion of religious ideas. Those beliefs which are supposed to be most vital and important are those which are to be least examined, and the doctrines which are held to be the most solidly established of all are thought to be the least able to bear criticism of any. No one would fear to discuss the propositions of Euclid, lest he might find them false, but most people fear to discuss their theological beliefs, lest, presumably, they might find them untenable; for, obviously, if they were certain of finding them true, they would welcome criticism. And one notes, thus, a kind of truce in Ireland between the rival Christian sects which bespeaks insincerity. The stage when Catholic and Protestant clergymen held public debates in the Rotunda on the merits of their respective creeds has long been passed. Doubtless it was realised that such encounters were more likely to make Freethinkers than converts to either Catholicism or Protestantism. And so there has set in the ignoble fashion at present in vogue of discountenancing on both sides such discussion. Catholics make little or no open attempt to convert Protestants, and, beyond one or two irresponsible agencies, Protestants make little or no attempt to convert Catholics. Whenever a zealous Protestant,

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thinking he is carrying light unto darkness, drops a Protestant tract in the way of Catholics, the Catholic Press raises an outcry as if some heinous offence had been committed, and the well-to-do Protestant, anxious to live on good terms with his Catholic neighbours, joins in condemning such tactics as "bad form." The whole phenomenon, it must be repeated, stands for insincerity, the insincerity of men who, half-conscious of the weakness of their dogmatic base, yet lack the courage to submit their beliefs to the test of examination and criticism. Men who have truth are anxious, and properly anxious, to spread it, even as men loyally desiring the truth are concerned that other men, equally sincere, should vitally differ from them. If any astronomer or physician put forward a scientific view on any aspect of his studies, he would be affected by the knowledge that other astronomers and physicians disagreed with him, and he would assuredly seek to clear the disagreement up. At the very least he would not shun the whole difficulty. Yet that is the course prescribed and pursued all round on questions of religion in Ireland. One interesting and typical incident, illustrating this, comes to my mind. Some months ago Father Sheehan delivered an address to the "Catholic Truth Society" in Dublin. In the course of his remarks he advocated the cultivation of "passionless"

literature and the bowdlerising of poets like Burns and Byron, and in addition referred to the large numbers of cheap rationalist publications which were now openly sold in a "Catholic city" like Dublin, a fact which he deplored. Did he, however, recommend his hearers to peruse these books? Did he say, as one might expect a sincere and wise teacher to say: "Read, my friends, what the best minds have to say against you if you seek loyally the truth, for until you know the best that can be said against you, you know neither your weakness nor your strength"? Not at all. Father Sheehan merely fell back on the old and shameful dictum that these were "immoral" books, to be shunned by the faithful. And when it is mentioned that the publications in question consist mostly of cheap reprints of standard works by men like Mill, Spencer, Huxley, Darwin, Haeckel, Renan, and Matthew Arnold, the grossness of the libel may be estimated. At least Father Sheehan's creed did not deter him from blackening his neighbour's character, when that neighbour had the temerity to differ from his theology.

But that is the temper in which all such studies are met in Ireland. A cultivated ignorance, as ludicrous as it is contemptible, is the prevailing note. Read any popular journal and observe the tone of snobbish superiority to

modern science and all that it stands for ; so that when, as is often the case, we are warned against the "pride of knowledge," some of us are prone to reflect that, if that be a reprehensible vanity, the pride of ignorance must be considerably worse. You will find in any newspaper you take up long accounts of the interminable laying of foundation stones of churches, of the continual opening of bazaars for ecclesiastical objects, of lugubrious addresses from prelates and priests on themes that belong to the mental atmosphere of the Middle Ages. But of anything that connects with the real intellectual life of the world outside Ireland, little or nothing is heard. When, for instance, some time ago, an article appeared on the Abbé Loisy from the pen of a French critic, a widely-circulated clerical weekly editorially declared that it had never heard of Loisy and did not want to hear of him, the writer arguing, in bucolic fashion, that what did not interest him ought to interest no one else. A couple of years ago I heard a well-known Jesuit preacher, within a few months of the publication of the *Encyclopædia Biblica* (which was itself a redaction of current continental scholarship) tell a rather high-class congregation that modern criticism had left the Bible untouched. To pretend that discoveries which tell against you do not exist, to belittle those who make them, and abuse those who publish them, and, in



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short, to refuse to face the intellectual battle, confident in the final victory of the truth, is the attitude of our theological guides to-day. And it is this mental and moral cowardice, for which orthodoxy is primarily responsible, that helps to keep us as a people intellectually inferior. A vital concern for truth more than for established beliefs correlates with all the other virtues that keep a nation progressive and alive.

It would, however, be idle to make light of the tremendous forces that oppose the rational discussion of such questions as I have touched upon, and which produce the corresponding insincerity. Vast vested interests of all kinds stand in the way, whereas those who follow truth loyally have a thankless task, which nothing but an inward sanction can sustain. Yet they may reflect that never yet was progress possible without intellectual change, never yet did humanity advance a step without the breaking of old traditions and the discarding of old beliefs. The true humanist will assuredly wish that such change as must be should entail as little pain as possible, since it is not pain but growth in knowledge that is desired. But some pain is inevitable, and it is in the readiness to face it that true courage lies. For a nation, certainly, it bodes ill when, as a mass, it is afraid of truth, or at least afraid of the sacrifices by which alone truth can be attained.

## *THE MORAL FUTURE*

WE are living in an age of intellectual change. The old creeds are rapidly crumbling, the old ceremonies have no longer the old appeal. We are in the presence of a mental and moral transformation which is the inevitable prelude to outward and material reconstruction. As Mr. C. F. Masterman, in one of his recent essays, remarks : " To-day, were we but as sensitive to disturbance in the world of man's profound convictions, as to the obvious outward modifications of the forms of society in which those convictions are clothed, our ears might well be deafened by the noise of the crash of the elements, of growing and of dying worlds." One incident, as it concerns the theological side of this change, is the startling and acknowledged rapidity with which ancient dogma is being thrown off. The typical man of the present day no longer concerns himself with sin and salvation, candles and confessionals. The problems of humanity are becoming more important in the eyes of man than the problems of the gods, which become darker the more they are examined. One result of the decay of theological faith is the rise of human faith. The problem of the unemployed, the drink traffic, the control of the idle rich, the land question, the labour question, the slum question—all these are pushing aside the barren questions of the creeds.

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One phase of this change in these countries is the recent remarkable spread of cheap scientific and rationalist books. Of course the phenomenon might have been predicted. We are only witnessing the popular result of that great movement of thought set going by the scientific thinkers of the nineteenth century. The work of Spencer, Darwin, Haeckel, Huxley, Mill, Comte, Tyndall, with the kindred literary work of men like Matthew Arnold, Renan, and numerous others—all this could not remain for ever in high-priced volumes out of reach of the multitude. What is happening is that the literature which was the common possession of inquiring and reflecting men is descending to the “man in the street” and the great minds of the last two generations are coming into their inheritance.

All this, however, is alarming the Churches. As Mr. Lecky has pointed out, the Church was never enamoured of knowledge. Faith, not knowledge, is what it naturally stands by, and faith is much more likely to be the handmaid of ignorance than of its opposite. At first sight it might be difficult to see the cause of the disquietude. Nothing new or essentially new has been produced. Only existing literature has been cheapened. Yet there have been papers and discussions on the subject at every Church meeting. It would thus seem

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that the Church only grows alarmed, not at the fact of "heresy" itself, but at the prospect of "heresy" becoming popular.

Amongst the more recent bodies to seriously tackle the problem has been the conference of the Catholic Truth Society held at Birmingham at the end of September. At this conference the most important paper read was one by Father Gerard, S.J., curiously entitled: "A Leaf from the Enemy's Book." The meaning of that title was indicated in Father Gerard's suggestion that the Catholic Church, with an infallible Pope at its head, should take a leaf out of the book of the much-despised and much-abused Rationalists and should apply to the propagation and defence of the Holy Faith the method which the "unbelievers" had found so efficacious for their purposes. The dignity of the title and suggestion does not seem to have excited remark, but points from Father Gerard's paper are interesting as showing the trend of events. It is one of the regrettable characteristics of theologians when dealing with Rationalists to impute bad faith at every turn, and to suggest that those who philosophically disagree with them are morally debased. The absurdity of such a line of attack in the case of the men whose works I mentioned at the beginning was probably so striking as to deter Father Gerard from the worst excesses which are common on that side.

But he does suggest that Mr. Edward Clodd's writings are welcome to a certain "class of minds" who desire to "freely follow their own inclinations without a thought of anything else;" he pretends that Mr. Grant Allen complained of not being allowed to publish obscenity, and he appeals for help against Rationalism to "all who believe that man is essentially different from the beasts in the field and the earth he treads"—the innuendo being that the Rationalists preach a beastly and demoralising creed.

There can, I think, be no question that this line of criticism, to say nothing of its lack of charity, has imported an amount of bitterness into philosophical and ethical discussion that has in the long run reacted unfavourably on the theological side. The angeriness of the attack tends to beget bitterness in the defence, though it must be said that the naturalist school does not err in this respect to anything like the same degree as its rival; and in any case, since the question at issue is one of truth, the importing of passion merely darkens matters. There are, no doubt, morally-flawed sceptics just as there are morally-flawed Catholics and even as there have been immoral popes. But the argument that an evil-disposed person is likely to derive some satisfaction from a study of Darwin or Huxley, or is likely to approach that study in the hope of finding a

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sanction for immorality there is ridiculous. One result of such innuendoes as Father Gerard's is sometimes overlooked. When young students, in spite of the appeals and threats, do study the scientific writers for themselves and find no such lurid incitements to crime as it is suggested they will find, they naturally get a shock at the revelation of the untruth which theologians like Father Gerard have not been ashamed to propagate.

Beyond a disparagement of all the writers whose works have been named and a rather inconsistent attack on a body called the Rationalist Press Association which issues these books, there was little or no argument in Father Gerard's paper. But there was an appeal to his Catholic audience to adopt the methods of the Association in question and circulate cheap and well-written defences of Catholicism, or perhaps more exactly, attacks on the naturalist writers. An answer to Haeckel would certainly be more effective than a sixpenny pamphlet on the Immaculate Conception.

It is here that the difficulty for the Catholic arises. Thinking people are no longer interested in the details of the dogmatic case; they are interested in the pretensions of that case as a whole. The battleground has been shifted. With all their alleged defects the scientists have surely accomplished that, and Father



Gerard has followed them. His paper was entirely taken up with "destructive criticism." It was a negating of the right of the scientists to speak at all on theological or philosophical subjects, and a denial of the truth of their conclusions. But when Huxley and Tyndall are completely exploded and Mr. Grant Allen's reputation cheerfully destroyed, we will be as far as ever from the doctrines of Papal Infallibility and Original Sin. The Rationalist criticism thus succeeds where the mere Anti-Rationalist criticism cannot. If the scientists make good their case the dogmas are *ipso facto* shattered. But if Darwin be overthrown, the dogmas are no nearer substantiation.

Because of this consideration the most prominent feature of addresses like Father Gerard's is their insincerity. In this paper he appeals constantly to that very criterion of reason which is at other times denounced. The questions that are raised by the scientists are only to be settled by an appeal to science. The Rationalists can only be fought with rational weapons. The literature, in short, for which Father Gerard is appealing and which he is asking Catholics to subsidise, is a literature of reason, an exposure of alleged bad logic and bad science. But Father Gerard cannot claim that his dogmas may be rationally established, and there is thus an ugly

suspicion of moral crookedness in seeking the verdict of a court whose jurisdiction is denied. If Father Gerard should scientifically prove Haeckel to be wrong, we know he would claim the victory. But if Haeckel should conclusively prove Father Gerard to be wrong the latter would fall back on "authority" or "revelation" or some other non-rational sanction. Either way he claims to dominate. Would it not then be more strictly honest to abandon this sham invocation of reason, this pretence that Catholic dogmas can be established by the same methods as Darwin employs to establish his theses. We know it is a hollow pretence.

The Catholic Truth Society, by the issue of such books as the proceedings under notice foreshadow, may at the utmost overthrow some scientific reputations, and may, perchance, turn some Agnostics into Theists; but how will Catholicism be thereby furthered? To accept that religion men must, as it were, commit intellectual suicide; they must accept dogmas, not at all because these are reasonable, for they are not, but because they have been taught by an "authority" which is above criticism. That is the end of the question; and when one observes such proposals as Father Gerard's the chief thing that strikes one is their inconsequence. For instance, in his paper Father Gerard told Catholics that what they should supply to counteract the

scientists would be a "literature which may at least help readers to learn how to think, to distinguish assertion from argument, and speculation from fact, making them realise the extremely narrow limits of what can be termed our knowledge and the folly of imagining it to extend to that whereof we are in truth as profoundly ignorant as ever we were."\* The description might pass for a definition of the aims of the Agnostics, and if Father Gerard is desirous of issuing books which answer this description he could not do better than adopt the works of the Rationalists he denounced. They do emphatically distinguish dogmatic assertion from argument and theological speculation from fact, and it is not they who are given to the folly of transcendental imaginings "whereof we are in truth as profoundly ignorant as ever we were." But in any case, Father Gerard's demand for books that shall make people think is an interesting variant on the frequent complaint from similar teachers that there is nowadays too much thinking and too little "faith."

The fact regarding dogmatic religion is that, to use a vulgar phrase, the game is up. Reactions there may yet be, a backward wave here and a forward one there; and, now that the imposing reign of unchallenged pulpit supremacy is ending, an evangelisation by

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\* "The Tablet," October 1st, 1904.

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pamphlet may achieve a little. But for discerning minds the old structure is gone, past repair. It is undermined on all sides, on that of physical science, of philosophy, of Biblical criticism, of the study of Christian origins. And to those who take note of the serious questions of to-morrow the centre of interest is not in the battle over dogma, which is already over, but in the problem of placing morality on a new and sounder basis than the old one which has crumbled away. Some there are who declare that the reign of science will mean an era of moral laxity, and that with the overthrow of dogma the sanctions for right conduct will have disappeared. It is a shallow view, negatived even at the moment by the very record of the chief men who are engaged in the propagation of the scientific view, and whose lives for the most part are lives absolutely above reproach. When one recalls the amazing patience of Darwin, the enthusiasm for humanity of Comte, the heroic self-sacrifice and abstemiousness of Spencer, necessary, indeed, to accomplish his huge task, the gentleness of Renan, the singleminded studiousness of Mill, one feels that it would be well if theological sanctions had always such examples to show.

It will be answered, of course—it has been answered—that these were exceptions, that they were high-minded men who would naturally

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have led upright lives in any case. The answer is unconsciously a complete surrender ; for it admits that morality is a " natural " product, depending on heredity, on character, and on early training. The moral instinct is as natural as any other instinct, and is even assumed as fundamental by the theologians themselves when they base their appeals on moral grounds. The theological assumption that men only abstain from injuring one another because of an ingenious system of *post-mortem* rewards and punishments, distributed on an absurd and incalculable basis, is the very reverse of fact. To say nothing of the brutalising effect of the belief in eternal punishment, which helped in turn to make men cruel, these beliefs have been the proximate cause of an enormous amount of human misery and ill-will. And if we compare the standard of general conduct in periods and countries where these threats have most force, with the standard in those periods and countries where they have least, we shall obtain a measure of the value of the dogmatic appeal.

The cause of morality will, in fact, permanently gain when morals are disentangled from dogma and empty ceremonials are no longer confused with human duties. None the less, however, must human sympathy and the ideals of justice, of truth, of kindness, be impressed on the new generations. At the base of all the

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old religions was fear ; but fear never yet was the mother of goodness. It might produce an external conformity, it could not furnish an inward light. At the base of the new religion there must be understanding. One man who understands is worth a thousand who merely obey.



## *POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM*

MORE than one recent incident has set up the fear in many minds that Ireland is about to experience another attack of that religious fever which has so often afflicted her in the past, at a time when other indications go to show that saner and more pacific ideals are gaining in strength. We continually suffer in Ireland from rival bigotries which, so far from injuring, positively help one another and stimulate each other. There is, firstly, the Orange and ascendancy party, continually waging a political war against the people and against the policy of self-government which is the chief cure for Orange and Catholic bigotry alike. That Orange party, with the vices which peculiarly attach to every such faction, maintained by outside political support and kept in countenance by outside authority, actuated by base and bigoted ideas, has the strength which all such minorities possess. It is comparatively compact, unimaginative, self-centred. Its boycott, of course, is chiefly political, but it also tends to set up a counter bigotry on the other side. That is the fate of all countries so situated as Ireland. The vices of the dominant faction, ruling without consent and without sympathy, corrupt the whole body politic, so that in such a soil race and religious passion waxes strong, and political science is at a discount.

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This seems to me the simple explanation of such incidents as the campaign started some time ago by a weekly Dublin journal to accentuate and embitter Catholic feeling, to make Catholics particularly sensitive as to their Catholicism, and to urge them to demand rights, not as citizens, nor in the interests of national well-being, but to demand them as Catholics in the interests of Catholicity. This campaign, it is true, is carried on at a level of vulgarity and with a wealth of epithet that might excite the envy of Mr. Chamberlain, and is of that "will-you-take-it-lying-down" order which peculiarly appeals to the uneducated and semi-educated mob, since it touches that natural and even healthy egoism which lies so near the surface in any crowd. The formula of that mob-appeal is now fairly familiar to most of us. When England, with a quarter of a million of men, set out to conquer two little peasant States in South Africa, the English Jingo politicians and journals appealed to the English mob in a fashion that would lead an observer to imagine that they were fighting a desperate battle for their very existence against tremendous odds.

A case by which the ethical standard of the leaders of this Catholic campaign might be tested arose in the matter of the anti-Jewish outburst in Limerick. An ignorant

priest in Limerick preached a sermon retailing old and exploded libels against Jews in general, and urging the people to boycott the Jews in Limerick, a sermon which, by the way, evoked a humane and admirable protest from Mr. Michael Davitt, one of the many incidents which justified the high place he held in the esteem of Irish democrats. What was the conduct of those who are so loud in their demand for "justice" to Catholics? They supported the priest. When Catholics are boycotted it is an outrageous injustice; when Catholics boycott others it is all right and proper, being merely a process of recovering their own. On many to whom this conduct appears defensible, probably nothing that is here written will have any effect. But to others the question may be put: on what principle is any lawless egoism to be condemned, if this be justified?

At the same time I would like to here record my conviction that the spirit of political exclusiveness and sectarian bigotry on the Catholic side, such as it is, does not in any respect equal that on the Protestant side, nor does any conduct on the part of Irish Catholics known to me compare with, say, the persistent and continuous boycott of Catholics in the matter of civic employment in Protestant Belfast. It is even doubtful whether the intolerant clericalist campaign before referred

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to commands any large support amongst lay Catholics themselves.

Let us, however, seek a clear intellectual outlook. Logically, of course, the conduct of the religionists all round is absurd. According to the Christian view, this world is a "vale of tears," a vestibule of eternity, a mere halting place on a road that stretches into the illimitable future. Yet amongst the people who profess this belief, the fight is waged with a bitterness which seems to suggest that the combatants are determined to stay in the "vestibule" as long as they can, and to devote all their energy to making it as comfortable, in the meantime, as possible. The contrast between precept and practice here is certainly amusing. Yet far be it from me to press the old precepts on the various combatants. The only modern Christian to profess the doctrine of non-resistance is Count Tolstoy, and even with him it is only a profession since he maintains a continuous and vigorous propaganda against what he considers the evils of modern society. Indeed his English admirers keep up a supply of books, pamphlets, and leaflets from his pen in such bewildering profusion that one never knows exactly whether one is reading a new pronouncement or merely a new edition of an old one.

Yet Tolstoy's example surely sets us on the

right path. The method of redressing the sectarian bitterness in Ireland is not by counter bitterness. We shall never cure matters by boycotting, by intimidation, or by abuse. It is by science and by moral appeal that progress is always to be permanently won. The first and absolutely necessary step is the winning of self-government. And it is the failure to recognise this that vitiates otherwise capable surveys like Mr. Filson Young's and Sir Horace Plunkett's. Indeed the latter book, in this respect, considering its title and pretensions, is almost rendered worthless. A man sets out to describe the condition of a patient suffering from cancer, and the one thing he will not discuss is—cancer. He will dispassionately and even illuminatingly discuss every by-effect of the malady, but he is ignorant of the fact of the malady itself, or else is professionally precluded from dealing with it. For most of the evils that many recent writers discuss have their proximate cause in the lack of political wisdom. And the only road to political wisdom is by way of political responsibility. A people long suffering from political servitude have the vices of slavery, lack of constructive political faculty, lack of initiative, lack of the wise compromise that comes of action; though notwithstanding these defects the Irish people, on the whole, have shown at the

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least as much political sagacity as the English.

But to recognise and proclaim these things does not by any means preclude the right or the propriety of internal criticism. Rather does that criticism come the more appropriately from those who are alive to the main political evil. And whilst demanding the redress of that evil, it becomes necessary, concurrently, to raise our own canons of conduct and scrutinise our own standards of thinking. Sir Horace Plunkett in one passage in his book observes :—

“The revolution in the industrial order, and its consequences, such as the concentration of immense populations within restricted areas, have brought with them social and moral evils that must be met with new weapons. In the interests of religion itself, principles first expounded to a Syrian community with the most elementary physical needs and the simplest of avocations, have to be taught in their application to the conditions of the most complex social organisation and economic life. Taking people as we find them, it may be said with truth that their lives must be wholesome before they can be holy; and while a voluntary asceticism may have its justification, it behoves a Church to see that its members, while justly acknowledging the claims of another life, should develop the



qualities which make for well-being in this life."\*

Some of us, of course, might cavil at Sir Horace's implication that it is possible to really combine concern for "another life" with effective regard for the well-being of this. The essential business of the Churches all round and the essence of the Church ideal is to prepare men for the "hereafter", and the affairs of this world are only treated as incidental to such preparation. The true logical antithesis of this view is the positivist and scientific ideal which, taking humanity as the highest we know, regards the well-being of humanity here as the greatest end for which we can work, and frankly accepting the fact that this life is the only one of which we have real knowledge, ignores all distracting hypotheses.

None the less, however, is it well and courageous for Sir Horace to put the secular ideal in his own words and fashion. It is easy for the popular Press to sneer at him on this score, for it is sure of a response from the religious multitude. But it is precisely in a country where the "principles" of "Syria," to use Sir Horace Plunkett's euphemism, are professed on all sides with a heartiness almost unknown elsewhere, that we have the eternal

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\* "Ireland in the New Century," pp. 103-104.

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sectarian wrangles, here over the creed of a dispensary doctor or an inspector of schools, there over the religion of an unfortunate foundling, who may be "damned" without its knowledge by the votes of a board of guardians consisting for the most part of publicans and slum-owners.

One would on first thoughts conclude that the spectacle of such sectarian squabbling would perforce raise in an ordinarily intelligent people doubts of the genuineness of the creeds that could stimulate it. But such is not the case ; it seems to require a definitely humanist philosophy and a humanitarian enthusiasm to realise that the welfare of humanity as such is the greatest and noblest end for which humanity can work. But humanity in Ireland has not yet come into its inheritance. In a review of Mr. Filson Young's book, *Ireland at the Cross Roads*, the Rev. Dr. McDonald, in an article in the *Freeman's Journal*, wrote : "Consider the real Ireland too. In that sad country one thing only has prospered, as Mr. Young admits—the Church ; and she is based on a system of almost absolute self-government." So far as Dr. McDonald intended this as an argument for self-government, as against Mr. Young, I am with him. But he does not seem to have realised the ominous significance of his point. The Church has flourished amidst universal decay. Precisely.

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In a country warped and injured by lack of political freedom, it would be curious if intellectual freedom prospered. The Irish people, trampled by alien and unsympathetic rule, have looked with aching eyes to a heaven of bliss, and they have, more or less apathetically lain down in their chains, soothed by the hope of after-reward. If Ireland is to be saved we must surely change all that; the people must turn their energies from dreaming of another world to the task of bettering and beautifying the things of this. It is nobler to make a happy human home than to raise a dozen granite temples for a worship which does not need them; it is a greater thing to rescue one human heart from despair than to have kept every letter of the religious law. We need in Ireland a spirit of intellectual freedom, and a recognition of the supremacy of humanity. And so far from this prescription being offered as a substitute for national freedom it is urged as a necessity of a true national ideal. For the synthesis of much recent criticism is this: intellectual freedom and political freedom are not opposites. Rightly understood, intellectual freedom and political freedom are one.

## *DR. SHEEHAN'S DEFENCE OF DOGMA.*

PERHAPS nothing more strikingly illustrates the progress, however slow it may be, towards positive and real standards of intellectual value, than the subtle shifting of the ground of orthodox defence in recent times. Every modern apologist for dogmatic religion, from Mr. Benjamin Kidd, shall we say to Dr. Sheehan, practically appeals, not to the test of truth, but to the test of utility. It is true, of course, that Dr. Sheehan formally repudiates utilitarianism, but it is a utilitarian standard he applies all the same. The burden of all the present day religionists is practically this, man requires theistic and Christian dogmas and threats in order to coerce him to do what is right. These beliefs and threats may or may not be true and valid; at least they are necessary lest humanity should rush down a steep place into the sea. The moral sense, whilst being implicitly appealed to as something natural, is conceived of solely in terms of crude selfish desire, and if men once lose the steadying and sobering belief in an eternal hell (which, by the way, is almost always reserved for other people) they will gaily commence to cut one another's throats and take their recreation by way of stealing one another's gold plate. That is the dogmatic case in a nut-shell.

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That that case has little or no relation to fact is a matter with which I shall presently deal. But at the outset it is well to emphasise the point that this habit of regarding beliefs, or any alleged statements of fact, apart from the primary question of their truth, is in reality a piece of childish folly. There are many "beliefs" that would cause any given individual the greatest pleasure and comfort to harbour. Let a poor and weary man in the midst of financial trouble fill his mind with the notion that a rich uncle in Chicago has left him a fortune, and if he can believe it, it may be as good as a month at the seaside. Let a forlorn lover but convince himself that the cold-hearted object of his affections has relented, and he may be changed from a state of melancholia to one of transcendent joy. But how could such effects be achieved save by a process of deliberate self-delusion? And assuming them to be in any way beneficial, how could such effects survive the discovery that the foundations on which they rested were false? In any event, whatever be the case with individuals, there is no possibility of permanently deluding humanity. The only permanent basis of morality is truth. And the tendency on the orthodox side to substitute a utilitarian test for *belief* is one that reveals the groundless fear that the truth, even if immediately unpleasant, does not in the long

run contain its own adjustments. A moral code founded on an intellectual basis that will not stand critical examination is a house built on sand. Herbert Spencer, after all, put a whole philosophy in a sentence when he said: "The only infidelity is the fear lest the truth be bad."

There is another point that calls for notice. The dogmatist, by his appeals, practically shows that he admits the existence of morality without dogma. Dr. Sheehan, in a recent paper,\* holds up a dreadful vista of evils as likely to flow from the decay of dogmatic religion. Anarchism, Socialism, Saint-Simonism, and what-not-other awful and horrible things, will come on the heels of a non-dogmatic morality. But since Dr. Sheehan is primarily addressing those who disagree with him (since it would be useless to argue with the already convinced) he assumes, most curiously, that the "non-dogmatist" feels that awful and horrible things should be prevented. And so we are asked to set up dogma in order to prevent what, without dogma, we already reprobate. Just as all argument implies a common standard of intelligence, so all appeals to moral feeling imply the very existence of a common moral sense. By the very form of his plea Dr. Sheehan thus upsets his essential argument.

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\*"New Ireland Review," August, 1905,



When, however, we turn to that argument in detail its most prominent feature is its narrowness. Dr. Sheehan's article is typical of the limitations, intellectual and other, which are a prime condition of a belief in orthodox Christian dogmas at the present day. In the first place he is solely concerned with that fragment of humanity, limited in time and numbers, who have heard of or have embraced Christianity. Nay, not even that, he is solely dealing with that smaller fragment which has embraced orthodox Catholicism. The human point of view is never reached in any direction. In one passage he asks why people do not accept the teachings of Confucius, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and others; surely hundreds of millions *have* accepted the teachings, say, of Confucius; generations of men in China have lived by his light for centuries. And if the Christian God be other than a mere tribal deity, surely these millions of Chinese are as much His children as Father Sheehan himself. Why should a just God have freely given a chance of salvation, or even a chance of a high morality, to ancient Italy, and withheld such chances from ancient China, if all men are equal in His sight? But Dr. Sheehan practically bewails the error of the whole modern world. From Rousseau to Frederic Harrison, from Tennyson to Walt Whitman every modern of note has been left in

ignorance of the truth of those dogmas which Providence seems to have exclusively confided to Father Sheehan and his friends. Let it be admitted that such naïve conceits are almost refreshing at this time of day. But when a man implies or declares that he has been specially favoured by some person or power, he has inevitably raised the question as to the principles on which that person or power distributes favours.

In the present case Dr. Sheehan has appealed to the experiential test. To the justice of that test one must put in a demurrer; for even were it proved that the dogmatists had a monopoly of good conduct, the question of why Infinite Justice had thus created such a monopoly would remain. But with that demurrer, let us go to the test of experience. Is it then the fact that those who abandon the dogmatic case are base and evil-minded men who prey upon their fellow-men, whilst the orthodox dogmas uniformly produce flowers of virtue in those who believe them? Father Sheehan has mentioned various writers and thinkers who abandoned dogmatic beliefs. Let us go through the list. Is Frederic Harrison known as an apologist for corruption in English public life? Was Herbert Spencer a well-known despoiler of women? Does anyone allege that Haeckel is a confirmed drunkard? Was Comte a proved murderer

or Renan a convicted thief? Did Tennyson when he "threw dogma to the winds" gravitate to the criminal dock? Was Mill a blackguard? Did Huxley figure in the divorce court? Is Mr. John Morley a base-minded scoundrel?

Surely the very asking of such questions almost constitutes an insult. Should we not rather ask: Were and are these men, taken on the whole, not models of scrupulous and honourable living, devoted to science and literature and the service of humanity? No one holds them up as perfect; all men have flaws. And I do not claim that one may not find defective character allied to the intellectual rejection of dogma, just as we find plenty of defective character allied to orthodox belief. But I do claim that though the men I have named differ intellectually from Dr. Sheehan, they are certainly as well-conducted as he, whilst I am sure many of them are incapable of his partisanship. They would hardly be likely, any of them, to write that "it lends but sanction to human vice and passion to say: Live noble lives and quit yourselves like men in the fight." If such teaching lends a sanction to vice, how is it we do not see the vice in the lives of the teachers themselves? Dr. Sheehan contrives to insinuate in various ways that the teaching of a human morality untrammelled by theological dogma leads to bestiality. But

beyond *innuendo* he produces nothing. He tells us that it requires the thunders of Sinai to validate the injunction against bearing false witness. And a couple of pages further on he implies (p. 331) that men like Carlyle and Karl Marx (strange combination) taught that "there is nothing true, nor genuine, nor honest under the sun." What are we to say of the veracity or morality which puts into the mouth of opponents trash which none of them ever uttered? Let me hasten to add that I cannot bring myself to believe for a moment that Dr. Sheehan would wilfully misrepresent anyone. All that has happened is that, under the sway of passion, with all his dogmatic belief, Dr. Sheehan has worked himself up to think that men whose teaching he intensely dislikes are capable of talking transparent nonsense. At the same time I should be sorry for any humanist who would be guilty of such recklessness in paraphrasing an opponent's utterance; he would be held up, I fear, to our scorn as a very embodiment of iniquity.

"Ah," it will be said, "all this is quite true. The leaders of modern freethought are men of culture and refinement; 'lolling in arm-chairs' they do not realise the evil that they do; their intentions may even be good. It is in their followers—the rank and file—that we must look for the hideous results of

their teaching." This kind of argument I have myself heard used by a gentleman who, a few minutes before, had contended that Christianity was not fairly to be judged by the corruptions of it current in the market place. Such be orthodox ideas of equitable judgment. And in any case it is safe to make imputations against a crowd. But who are these people who take the teachings of Spencer or Comte to mean that they may revel in bloodshed and lechery? They loom large in the orthodox imagination, but I fear nowhere else. I have been reading of them for a long time, but I have never met them in the flesh. They certainly do not disclose themselves in the criminal statistics. Of the murderers hanged in Ireland say in the last ten years how many were Free-thinkers? How many of those charged in our police courts are students of Positivism? Surely the case against which we are arguing is farcical. Perhaps, however, Father Sheehan has in mind what is specifically called social crime. Well, in Ireland during the past twenty-five years, to go no further back, we have admittedly had a good deal of unrest. There have been murders like those of the Phoenix Park; moonlighting, boycotting, "intimidation," and so on. I pass no detailed comment here on how much of all this was excusable or justifiable in any way, though personally I hold that very much of it, like

all such happenings, was excusable even if regrettable; the primary criminals in such cases, in my judgment, are governors and those in authority who, by their conduct, make such violence the only channel of popular protest. There would be very little social crime if there was social justice. But Dr. Sheehan is in different case. To him, as to Burke in his reactionary mood, every kind of popular upheaval is iniquitous in the last degree. Amongst the "ugly brood" whom he deplures, he omits to mention Fenians and Land Leaguers. But that can only be an oversight. Yet how many of the social "criminals" in Ireland could be traced to the influence of anti-dogmatic teaching? Indeed if Dr. Sheehan had ever glanced at the diatribes circulated by Orangemen and ultra-Protestants in England, he would have found out that the attack on landlordism in Ireland, with all its results, is often benignly attributed to the "immoral" teachings of the Catholic Church. And the Orangemen have this much justification for their diatribes, that the persons concerned are unquestionably Catholics, whilst Father Sheehan has absolutely nothing to justify his diatribes but his own assumptions.

The root of the whole difference is in the view we take of humanity. The dogmatist looks at humanity with jaundiced eyes as a

fallen race, prone naturally to evil, and he thinks it can be kept from the abyss of destruction only by a kind of transcendental hangman's rope. Considering that Europeans, at any rate for hundreds of years, have been taught to despise humanity it is small wonder that we have much to deplore. But such an outlook leads us straight to the most hideous pessimism. If the only hope of morality is a belief in the validity of "the thunders of Sinai," or an acceptance of the doctrines of the Crucifixion and the Atonement, then the vast majority of the human race has never known any morality and never will. But to suggest that, say, the Japanese are an immoral crowd of wretches who, not believing in Catholic dogmas, have no notion of what right conduct means, is merely to advertise our own ignorance or our own conceit. As a matter of fact what the dogmatist offers is not a morality, but a police measure. Yet, as Mill said, a man who refrains from wrong-doing because of the fear of hell is not a good man, but a bad man in chains. Such chains may possibly be necessary to those who have grown accustomed to their use; none the less would it be our duty to train a race able to do without them. Yet even the risk of temporary moral loss is very doubtful. Mr. Morley in his *Diderot* suggests that the decline of sexual morality in eighteenth century France



may have been due to the discrediting of religion. "This," he says, "must always be the natural consequence of building sound ethics on the shifting sands and rotting foundations of theology."\* But Mr. Morley's point is well met by Mr. Cotter Morrison. Referring to the idea that the license of manners of the French upper classes in the eighteenth century was in some way due to the propaganda of Rousseau, Diderot, and Voltaire, he says: "But such an idea has no foundation. Corrupt as was the society which read the novels of Louvet and the younger Crebillon, it was in a variety of ways superior to the society to which Bossuet and Bourdaloue preached, and which flocked to hear the sacred dramas of the spotless Racine. The whole of the reign of Louis XIV. was marked by a great depravity of manners, and this depravity was found quite compatible with an ostentatious and possibly sincere attachment to religion. The King, in spite of the gross immorality of his private life, was a bigot in matters of faith."† Yet even the morality of Louis at its worst was not lower than that of the mediæval Papal Monarchy, when every Council of the Church was a scene of contention and intrigue and the succession to the Papacy was constantly regulated

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\* "Diderot and the Encyclopædists," 1 vol. ed., p. 50.

† "The Service of Man." p. 129.

by anything but "spiritual" considerations.

But even were it proved that there was some risk of temporary moral slackening by the rejection of discredited theological belief, all progress of every kind involves some possible risks. One of the standing arguments in the mouths of Unionists against Irish self-government is that the people, being unaccustomed to such self-rule, would abuse it. Yet only by steadily following the better light will we ever move to higher things.

The humanist view is that morality rests on sympathy, and that sympathy is as natural to the heart of man as that purely self-regarding feeling on which the dogmatist solely bases his "moral" appeals. Prince Kropotkin in his recent fascinating book, *Mutual Aid*, has shown that this sense of co-operation and sacrifice pervades even the whole animal world. And in mankind it can be consciously developed so that from it we get most of the arts and graces which have made civilisation possible. The heart of man then is not fundamentally and mysteriously prone to evil; it has the potentiality of all good within it. And to those who declare that such teaching is negative and infidel I would give this prescription for a nobler faith: only by steadily believing that Man is naturally capable of the highest will we ever evoke the highest there is in Man.







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